

Lesson 19

Growing In Understanding

Introduction:

To gain a broad view of the kingdom of God parables, the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke need to be dovetailed together. From that we discover the order that Jesus gave the parables in, where He was at the time and to whom He gave them.

Location: Jesus is sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee¹.

Audience: The multitudes including the disciples.

- Jesus tells the first parable, that of the sower to everyone.
- Jesus gives the interpretation of the first parable, that of the sower to His disciples only.
- Jesus issues two commands to His disciples based on their understanding of the parable of the sower. They involve a lamp and a standard of measure.
- Jesus tells the second parable, that of the growing plant to his disciples only.
- Jesus tells the third parable, that of the wheat and tares to everyone.
- Jesus tells the fourth parable, that of the mustard seed to everyone.
- Jesus tells the fifth parable, that of the leaven to everyone.

Location: Jesus is in a house.

Audience: The disciples only.

- Jesus gives the interpretation of the third parable, that of the wheat and tares to His disciples only.
- Jesus tells the sixth parable, that of the treasure hidden in a field to His disciples only.
- Jesus tells the seventh parable, that of the pearl of great price to His disciples only.
- Jesus tells the eighth parable, that of the dragnet cast into the sea to His disciples only.
- Jesus tells the disciples that now having understood the parables; they will be able to grasp what had already been spoken concerning the kingdom of God, as well as things to come.

Reading The Scripture:

Jesus Continues His Discourse With the Disciples

Mark 4:21-29 and Luke 8:16-18

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should **come to light**. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows-- how, he himself does not know.

¹ The Bay of Parables sits halfway between Tabgba and Capernaum.

The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

come to light. come to light. To be revealed or understood.

The Commands:

1. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.
2. Take care what you listen to.

The Lesson – Part One:

According to the gospel of Mark, upon finishing His explanation of the parable of the sower, Jesus adds two illustrations. One concerns a lamp and the other a measure. In conjunction with these illustrations He issues two commands. They are "*if any man has ears to hear, let him hear*" and "*take care of what you listen to.*" Both the illustrations and the commands are linked to the parable of the sower and its interpretation.

In the interpretation of the parable, the seed is the Word of God. The term "Word of God" can take several forms: the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, Himself, or something spoken by God through someone. It doesn't matter in which form the "Word of God" comes, the principles in the illustrations and commands hold true.

Jesus tells His disciples that the purpose of a lamp is to provide light. The disciples recognize that He is referencing the parable and in turn revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of God. They also remember that Jesus had recently used similar words during His Sermon on the Mount. At that time Jesus said, "*They were the light of the world.*" For the first time the disciples are beginning to catch the role to which they have been called. They are to be the light by revealing the "Word of God", which is the kingdom of God. Jesus assures them of this when he states, "*For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light.*"

People hide valuable things and they keep them hidden until they deem that it is the appropriate time for their use. It is similar to a seed being hidden or planted in the ground and then coming forth in its season. The value of the seed and what it will produce is not known until the light of the sun reveals it. People also keep secrets until they find someone they can trust with their secrets. Jesus is simply telling the disciples that they are the trusted ones and that this is the time to reveal the "Word of God." He concludes by issuing the instruction, "*If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.*"

Based on the parable of the sower, which the disciples have just heard, this command takes on new force. The words they are hearing with their ears are to be planted and remain in the fertile soil of their hearts. Then the words will grow and produce more words for planting in other hearts.

Because the soil of a disciple's heart is fertile, Jesus issues a caution. "*Take care what you listen to.*" In other words, be selective in the things you allow to be planted and remain in your heart. Why? Because whatever words are planted and remain in the heart whether good or evil will grow to produce the words that you will speak. And everything you allow to grow will be multiplied.

Group Discussion:

1. How do sunlight and water affect growth? (Both are necessary for growth. Too little sunlight and the seed will not grow to maturity. However sunlight will cause a plant to wither and die if it doesn't have an adequate water supply. Too much water kills the plant by drowning.)
2. What does sunlight symbolize? (Affliction or persecution)
3. What does water symbolize? (The Holy Spirit according to John 7:37-39)
4. Where do sunlight and water come from? (Heaven)

The Lesson – Part Two:

Studying the parable of the sower also sheds light on the rules that govern understanding other kingdom parables.

1. The subject of each kingdom of God parable is the rule of God.
2. The truths concerning God's rule can be applied to an individual or all those who are ruled by Him.
3. Every parable makes one main point concerning the kingdom of God.
4. The concepts and principles used within the parable are truths concerning the rule of God. These truths add depth and clarity to the subject and main point. They can be carried from one kingdom parable to another. An example of one of these truths is, seeds produce plants.
5. The specific meaning that Jesus assigns to any word remains the same when used in the other kingdom parables. For example, seeds are words.

As Jesus tells His disciples the parable of the growing plant more truths become evident. The primary point of the parable is that the kingdom of God grows. This growth can be observed individually and corporately. According to the parable a word planted in the heart takes time to grow before it reaches maturity and it grows in three identifiable stages. The three stages of growth are referred to as the blade, the head, and the mature grain in the head. These growth stages correspond to those who have believed the word of salvation. The apostle John in his first epistle identifies these three stages as children, young men and fathers. It is at maturity that new seed is formed and reproduction occurs.

Group Discussion:

5. What are some other truths that can be ascertained from the parable of the growing plant?
 - a. Initially there is no evidence that a word is going to grow so it takes faith on the part of the sower to believe that it will.
 - b. Since growth takes time it requires patience on the part of the sower to see the words he has spoken bear fruit.
 - c. Watering begins soon after the seed is planted and continues throughout the entire growth period.
 - d. Sunlight only comes into play after the blade has been exposed.
 - e. Weeding occurs when both species of plants can be distinguished.

Application:

Prepare to make a short presentation to the group at the next meeting on the parable assigned to you. Develop the main point and supporting truths. Discuss how the parable might be applied either individually or corporately.